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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/8/2015
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SUBJECT: LIBYA ON LINE POISED FOR GROWTH

REF: TRIPOLI 00036

CLASSIFIED BY: Gregory L. Berry, Chief Of Mission, USLO, Tripoli
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) Summary: Director and Founder of Libya On Line (LOL), Moawiya Maghur, describes the genesis and fast growth of Libya's most weighty Internet portal, and estimates that more than 20 per cent of Libyans under the age of 35 access the Internet on a regular basis. LOL offers a range of products, from technical consulting and product design to online marketing and assistance with trade shows. LOL's sponsors include Coca Cola and British Airways, drawn by circulation figures that surpass those of local newspapers, and reach a more affluent audience. End Summary.

20% of Libyan Youth Are Connected

2. (C) Econoff met 1/6 with LOL's director, Moawiya Maghur, son of former Libyan Foreign Minister Kamal Maghur, at the Tripoli offices of Libya On-Line. Maghur's premises serve as combined company headquarters and Internet cafi, which LOL uses as a marketing tool for its various services, including software development, networking, web hosting and domain name registration. Maghur says LOL, which employs 15 men and women (the majority of whom are young, female, and by Tripolitanian standards, extremely liberally-dressed), has registered 2000 domain names in 2004, and is currently hosting 600 sites. LOL employs two individuals whose job it is to read and provide English language translations of Libyan press and television programs. With regard to the Libyan cyber market as a whole, Maghur estimated that 5% of the total population uses the Internet, but that the figure was considerably higher, perhaps 20-25% among those under 35, and those living in Tripoli. "We even get a lot of older people, in their mid to late sixties, coming in here and chatting or video-conferencing with their children and grandchildren abroad," Maghur said. "Of course," he continued, "the Internet offers a way of livening up one's social life a bit. As was the case in Jordan in the early 90's, for example, many young people here use the Internet as a means to get to know each other without having to be seen in public." In addition to its Gargaresh location, LOL operates a cyber cafi at Tripoli International Airport. Maghur says that business is good, particularly in the area of networking services. LOL has run into some problems marketing, the same issues that plague most high-profile businesses in Tripoli: "We bought a 3000 LD (about 2500 USD) sign for the front, and they came and took it down. They said the sign needed to be in Arabic."

Libya On-Line: Libya's Principal Portal

3. (C) The showpiece of LOL is its eponymous Internet portal, Libya On Line, which Maghur's brother started on a shoestring budget in Ottawa, Canada, as a means of introducing people in North America to Libya and its culture. Libya On-Line contains an impressive set of information on Libyan tourist sites,

government institutions, and private businesses, as well as a "Yellow Pages" directory of 2000 contacts. Maghur says he originally worked with Libyan Chamber of Commerce to develop the directory, but that the Chamber was so difficult to work with that he pulled out of the agreement after a year, at a financial loss: "We entered into an agreement with them to organize a trade expo; we printed CDs and brochures for them, and even managed part of the event-then during the show, one of their employees came by and started screaming, demanding to know why we were stealing their name." Maghur expects to expand the directory using a database of business names collected from a friend at the Tripoli land registry, which keeps the names of most new Libyan businesses. LOL is sponsored by Coca Cola, Puma, British Airways, Afriqiya, and Libtra Tours, a member of the Hosni Bey Group (refcable). LOL gets about 45,000 hits a month, compared with 33,000 a month three years ago.

The Genesis of Libyan e-Commerce:

¶4. (C) While others scoff at the idea that there are any "e-businesses" in Libya, Majhur says it is no joke, that LOL, through its Canada parent Visions, has helped create e-commerce capabilities for a number of local firms and artists, using Canada-based payment systems. Maghur gave as case in point a website for a singer (Maghur wouldn't give us the name, but a reliable source indicates it is likely Sheb Jilani, the "most self-important" of rising Libyan musical talent), who wanted to sell his CDs direct to the international market. "We sold about 500 of these, and he came back to us a bit later and said he's worth a hundred times as many. We gave him back the CDs, and he tried to do it himself. Within a month, there were pirated copies of the CD all over Tripoli (one has to wonder if LOL had anything to do with this)." Maghur works with Libyan graphic artists to put their work on line, and is in the process of organizing a competition for Libyan singers, replete with internet voting and prizes. LOL also manages trade events, through affiliates. LOL will launch a sister site, "Tijara" (trade), in three months, focusing on providing useful information for foreign businesses, including Arabic translations of foreign press (the portal is bilingual, Arabic-English).

¶5. (C) Comment: Moawiya Maghur is among perhaps a half-dozen private businessmen we have met whose projects and business sense have impressed us as "out of the ordinary". Some of the others include Buraq Air's CEO Mohammed Bubeida, Mohammed Gherwash, head of Winzrik Tours, and Hosni Bey, of the Hosni Bey Group (refcable). All of these individuals are foreign-educated. The personalities appear to be such that they would succeed in even a significantly more competitive market. End Comment.

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